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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0284
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1102
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 0189
RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE PRIORITY 0102
RUEHQD/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 0454
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0031
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 001311

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WHA/CEN, WHA/USOAS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/22/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM SCUL NU VE

SUBJECT: GON RESPECTS VENEZUELAN DECISION TO CLOSE RCTV,
BUT CLAIMS NICARAGUA WILL CONTINUE TO GUARANTEE PRESS
FREEDOM

REF: STATE 67643

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

¶1. (C) On May 21, the Ambassador raised with Foreign Minister Samuel Santos the demarche points on press freedom contained in refetel. The Ambassador expressed concern that the imminent closure of Venezuelan television channel RCTV is an act that violates the OAS' Inter-American Convention on Human Rights, to which the Governments of Nicaragua and Venezuela are parties. Further, President Ortega's recent endorsement of the decision on the margins of the ALBA meeting in Barquisimeto, Venezuela, could lead to the assumption that Ortega supports this type of measure. Attempting to rationalize Venezuelan President Chavez' decision not to renew RCTV's license and Ortega's support for the measure, Santos asserted that in Nicaragua there is full press freedom and that at times one faces a "fine line" when making "technical" decisions regarding the operation of media outlets.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador clarified that President Chavez's action appears to be driven entirely by political interests, as Chavez himself has stated that he will not renew RCTV's license because the channel opposes him. Moreover, a number of NGOs, as well as the OAS, have publicly opposed Chavez's decision. Santos countered that the Nicaraguan government (GON) respects Venezuela's decision. He added that some media in Nicaragua are also problematic, for example (right-of-center) daily La Prensa, which he claimed often distorts or manipulates what he and other GON officials say; nonetheless, all media are allowed to operate freely in Nicaragua.

¶3. (C) Comment: It is clear from the conversation that the Ortega government is willing to support Chavez even when it comes to violating such basic rights like press freedom. Foreign Minister Santos asserts that press freedom is guaranteed in Nicaragua. Maybe for now, but the signs are not encouraging. The Ortega administration has cancelled government advertising in La Prensa in an attempt to financially hurt the paper, and President Ortega frequently rails against La Prensa and Nicaragua's right-of-center Channel 2. More likely, Ortega envies Chavez's ability to clamp down on RCTV and dreams of the day when he can do the

same with Nicaragua's Channel 2.
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